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ABSTRACT

The process by which five national organizations making up the State Education Policy Consortium meet their members' information needs is examined in this paper. The study sought to improve information services to state policymakers and to strengthen national organizations' dissemination capacity. During May through June 1984, interviews were conducted within the following organizations: the Council of Chief State School Officers; the Education Commission of the States; the National Association of State Boards of Education; the National Conference of State Legislatures; and the National Governors' Association. Data were also collected through document analysis, observation, and informal discussions with association staff and their policy constituents. Findings indicate that the needs identification and dissemination activities of the five national associations are generally effective. However, underlying dilemmas about the role of outside funding, the organizations's commitment to original policy analysis, and their national leadership function are reflected in decisions about information services and in constraints on the effectiveness of these services. Conclusions are that the organizations should consider developing more systematic and varied approaches to needs assessment, matching activities more directly to members' core needs, pursuing opportunities for a greater division of labor among the five organizations, and strengthening efforts to match staff expertise with organizational objectives. The appendix offers descriptions of the five national organizations and their support activities. (LMI)

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MEETING EDUCATION POLICYMAKERS' INFORMATION NEEDS: THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

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National Association of State Boards of Education
Council of Chief State School Officers
National Governors' Association
National Conference of State Legislatures
Education Commission of the States

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PREFACE

In our role as consultants to the State Education Policy Consortium, we assessed the process by which the five national organizations representing state education policymakers meet their members' information needs. The Consortium, a two-year project funded by the National Institute of Education, joined together the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the Education Commission of the States (ECS), the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE), the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), and the National Governors' Association (NGA) in an effort to improve information services to state policymakers and to strengthen the dissemination capacity of the national organizations serving those officials.

This report is based on a series of interviews conducted at each organization during May and June 1984, an examination of materials produced by the associations, attendance at association meetings and conferences over the past two years, and continuing informal discussions with association staff and their policymaker constituents. It summarizes our findings about the five associations' organizational objectives and how they relate to their dissemination activities; it then outlines the implications of these findings for future association activities.

This document is designed to aid the national organizations in planning their informational activities, and education researchers, such as those working at the national centers and regional laboratories, in strengthening the link between research and policy.

MEETING EDUCATION POLICYMAKERS' INFORMATION NEEDS: THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

INTRODUCTION

As the state role in promoting and funding educational improvement has grown, the informational activities of the national organizations representing state education policymakers have become increasingly important. The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the Education Commission of the States (ECS), the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE), the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), and the National Governors' Association (NGA) serve a critical function in: linking members with their counterparts across the country, translating findings from education research and practice into useful formats for policymakers, and informing members about relevant policy developments in other states and at the federal level. Yet in performing this role, these five organizations are constrained by limited resources and a need to tailor information to the diverse policy environments of the fifty states. A desire to address this shared challenge brought the five organizations together in the NIE-funded State Education Policy Consortium, and led to this assessment of the process by which each organization identifies its members' needs and disseminates information to them.

The Consortium organizations differ from one another in a number of important ways. They vary in the size of their staff, total budget, the proportion of their budgets derived from membership dues as compared with outside funding, and the number and size of special projects. NCSL and NGA serve their members on a wide range of policy issues, with only a small staff and proportion of total funding devoted exclusively to education. ECS, CCSSO, and NASBE address only education issues, but still vary significantly in size and budget. ECS, established to serve all state education policymakers, is the largest with a budget of over $3.5 million and a staff of approximately 50. CCSSO and NASBE have budgets equal to about one-third the size of ECS' and smaller staffs. Appendix 1 provides a brief description of each organization--its

membership, stated purpose, current special projects, and dissemination activities.

Despite these differences, however, each shares a common goal of providing members with information that will aid them in making education policy decisions. This report focuses on that organizational objective and examines how the five organizations determine what information their members need and want, and how they provide that information. It is organized around five major topics:

- organizational objectives and how they affect information dissemination
- the needs identification process within each organization
- the dissemination activities of each
- significant constraints on effective needs identification and dissemination
- the implications of these findings for future association activities

ORGANIZATIONAL OBJECTIVES AND HOW THEY AFFECT INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

How each organization approaches its needs identification and dissemination activities is strongly shaped by the association's overarching purpose--why it was established in the first place and what members expect from it. With the exception of ECS, the associations were initially established to serve two functions: representing their members' interests in Washington and helping build and maintain a membership network. Members still expect primarily lobbying and networking from CCSSO, NASBE, NCSL, and NGA, while from ECS they expect information, analyses, and to a lesser extent, networking. Yet, over time, organizational goals have become more diffuse and objectives expanded; largely in response to external funding opportunities that support analytic and information service activities in all five organizations.

The expansion of organizational objectives creates three major dilemmas that each association faces to some extent. How these conflicts are resolved influences the nature and extent of needs assessment and dissemination activities.

The Pursuit of Outside Funding

The first dilemma is whether or not to pursue outside funding opportunities. External funding can supplement the largely stable core funding derived from membership dues and can provide services of use to members. It also makes possible larger association staffs, and ideally, a broader range of expertise. On the other hand, the pursuit of external funding can mean that the organization becomes a holding company for projects that are quite peripheral to major association objectives and generates products that may be of little direct use to members.

How the associations have resolved the issue of external funding largely depends on the size of their core funding base. CCSSO and NASBE, which receive state dues that average about $6000 a state, rely heavily on external funding, with more than 60 percent of their budgets typically coming from outside sources. External funding for specific projects has allowed these organizations to expand their staffs and the range of expertise available to members. For example, in 1984, CCSSO employed a staff of 28; only eight of these were considered core--that is, supported by state assessments and the indirect fees from contracts and grants. If CCSSO had received no indirect funding from contracts and grants, its total staff size would have fallen to five or six.

The trade-off inherent in such a reliance on outside funding is that some projects (see Appendix 1 for recent examples) may lie outside the central concerns of state policymakers, and members may even be unaware of their existence. Although a dependence on outside funding can mean that the interests of funding sources like the federal government or foundations shape at least part of an organization's activity agenda, it need not always result in peripheral projects. For example, the CCSSO's Center on Evaluation and Assessment, funded by several foundations and the National Center for Educational Statistics, is central to the states' growing interest in collecting better data on a variety of educational indicators. Similarly, NASBE, in conjunction with NCSL, has obtained funding from the Danforth Foundation to coordinate state board reform policies with those enacted by legislatures. Such a match between members' interests and those of

funding sources is difficult to maintain, however, when the majority of organizational funding comes from external sources.

State assessments for NGA and NCSL are considerably higher (e.g., between $14,000 and $200,000 a state for NCSL), and this core funding comprises the majority of their total budgets. However, both organizations represent policymakers in general government and consequently, must serve members' information needs in a variety of policy areas, not just in education. The two organizations have addressed this resource constraint in different ways. NGA has largely confined its work in education to lobbying and networking, deferring other functions like educational policy analysis to ECS. NCSL, on the other hand, has expanded its resource base with outside funding for specific projects. However, the association has been fairly selective in the types of projects it has undertaken. Most relate to education issues with fiscal implications for state legislatures, and support technical assistance and dissemination activities. A grants review committee, comprised of NCSL members, reviews all funding proposals, and has traditionally disapproved ones that are not consistent with NCSL's priorities. Both these organizations, then, have found different ways to accommodate limits on the proportion of core funding available solely for education.

Until 1983, when ECS lost the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) contract, over 60 percent of its total budget came from federal contracts and grants. As a result of losing NAEP, the organization's 1984 budget declined by almost two-thirds. At that time, state dues were also increased and now constitute about 50 percent of the smaller budget. This shift represents a significant change, as compared with the period between 1980 and 1983 when state fees accounted for only about 15 percent of the ECS budget. The loss of NAEP forced ECS to examine its reliance on outside funding which often included projects (e.g., in energy education, drug abuse, women's equity) that had little to do with membership concerns. Today, the organization is more careful to seek funding that supports constituents' broad interest in issues related to state-initiated education reform.

As this discussion indicates, the associations are aware of the trade-offs associated with a reliance on project-specific, outside funding. However, limits on membership dues and a perceived need to maintain more than a skeletal staff make the pursuit of outside funding an attractive option. Nevertheless, this strategy imposes some very real costs on an organization's ability to concentrate its full attention on members' needs, thus risking their diminished attention and participation in the organization. Although each has sought to minimize these costs, the results have been mixed and the role of outside funding still poses a serious dilemma for all the organizations.

The Role of Policy Analysis

A second dilemma relates to the organizations' policy-analytic activities. Should groups of this type conduct original policy research or should they just translate and synthesize the work of others? Original research can fill information gaps on policy issues not being studied elsewhere. By conducting their own research, staff can also maintain credibility in the research community and be assured of access to other studies whose findings can be translated for member use. More importantly, the opportunity to produce high quality research is a strong incentive to attract and retain good staff.

However, the reality for most of the associations is that they can only support policy research with project-specific, external funding. Consequently, this activity presents a series of trade-offs for the organizations. Are the benefits derived from conducting original policy research and attracting a more analytically-oriented staff worth the price, if most of the studies are peripheral to major organizational concerns and objectives? What are the costs in terms of membership interest and satisfaction if such research generates materials that constituents do not need or lack time to read? What are the long-term pay-offs if this research does not generate hard money support, or if the vagaries of external funding make it difficult to maintain a stable research staff?

These are not easy issues to resolve. Despite the costs, policy research by the associations may be very important to their members, particularly since little of the research conducted by others focuses specifically on the policy concerns of state officials. For example, in the past, ECS' research on school finance policy met a very real need for state officials. Similarly, few academic researchers have examined the decisionmaking processes of state boards of education, yet as laymen, board members would like information about how to conduct their business more effectively. The need for association-conducted policy research is also reinforced by variation in the staff resources available to policymakers in different states. For example, in some states, the legislature may only have one or two people available to assist it in education policy research and development, while in a large state like California, the staff may number as high as 20 or more. Even chief state school officers, with proportionately larger education staffs than other policymakers, may only have a few people conducting policy research as opposed to short-term budget analyses or program evaluations.

A National Leadership vs. a Staff Role

The extent to which association staff should serve as an extension of state staff or should play a highly visible, national leadership role poses a third dilemma for the Consortium organizations. As extensions of state-level staff, they respond to information requests and perform analyses at the behest of state policymakers. A national leadership role means that the policymaker leaders and the executive staff of the associations attempt to shape the national education policy agenda, and are visible to the media and other policy elites. These two roles are not mutually exclusive, and the relative weight each is given may change over time. (This shift is particularly evident for ECS where the role of the executive staff has moved from an emphasis on the extension-of-state-staff model to one where the association and its executives are attempting to exert national leadership over the direction of education policy.)

Although the associations can perform both functions simultaneously, the two roles suggest different organizational strategies, use of resources, and types of staff. For example, staff who are accustomed to playing a behind-the-scenes support role are often not the same ones who can make speeches or issue reports that are quoted widely by the media. Therefore, for an association to play both roles, it needs to maintain a much more diversified staff. Similarly, policymakers who need staff services may question the direct value to them of paying dues to an organization that spends a significant amount of time dealing with national opinion leaders and the media. Consequently, a national leadership role may require greater outside funding support.

Like the other two dilemmas, it is not an easy one to resolve. Members clearly want their dues spent on constituent services. On the other hand, some policymakers, particularly governors, want to see greater national attention focused on the state policy perspective. The problem arises when an organization attempts to play both roles with limited resources and with staff who are not equally expert in both functions.

These dilemmas strongly shape each organization's approach to needs identification and dissemination. Association staff and the policymaker leaders of these groups are aware of the trade-offs involved in each. However, short-term decisions about funding opportunities and association activities are often made without a full assessment of how they will affect core organizational objectives.

THE NEEDS IDENTIFICATION PROCESS

The five organizations rely primarily on informal means to identify their members' information needs. They have tried formal methods, particularly membership surveys, with disappointing results. The more informal needs-sensing activities seem generally satisfactory to association staff, although they may not always reveal information requirements for the full range of members.

Association needs-assessment mechanisms include:

- Priority issue identification by organization governing bodies. Boards, committees, and task forces express their priorities for lobbying and for association staff work that indicate the most pressing education issues for state leaders. For example, at the 1985 ECS annual meeting, the Policy and Priorities Committee recommended that the organization give highest priority to four issues over the next three years: state action to address the needs of at-risk youth; effective state action to improve undergraduate education; teaching in America; and minorities in the professions.
- Input from organizational committees on meeting agendas. Membership priorities are reflected in the topics around which meeting sessions are structured. For example, NASBE staff work with member area directors to set regional meeting agendas that respond to membership concerns.
- Feedback from members at meetings. Some association staff, NCSL staff, for example, use evaluation forms to assess the importance of issues discussed at meetings.
- Informal discussions with members at meetings and on occasions when staff visit individual states to provide technical assistance.
- Conversations in the course of answering telephone information requests.
- Collection of clippings from the national education press and local press.
- Screening of state documents such as governors' state-of-the-state messages or state board meeting agendas.

A major reason for the reliance on informal means is the experience most of the associations have had with surveys. Response rates have been disappointingly low, reflecting the fact that state policymakers are extremely busy people with little time to complete questionaires. Although surveys have identified broad issue categories of concern to

members, generally they have not been structured to yield data about the precise kind of information needed on a topic, or the most desirable formats for such information. Developing sophisticated surveys that would yield such find-grained information is costly, and, given low response rates, probably not worth the effort. Even telephone surveys have proven only moderately effective as needs-assessment tools. For example, NASBE staffers each take responsibility for a set of states but find that regular calls to contacts in those states yield little new infomation for the amount of staff time the task requires. Although attempts to track development in individual states, such as ECS' efforts to keep abreast of recent legislative activities, furnish data on issue salience, such data have yet to be formated systematically or analyzed for needs-assessment purposes.

One systematic source of information is a service tracking form that records information requests by members. ECS staff use a form that lists: the nature of the request, the type of person making the request (e.g., governors' aide, media, legislative staff, etc.), the staffer answering it, the time spent providing the service, and the type of service given (phone or mail response, visit, printed materials sent). Requests are then tabulated by topic and state. Data are also kept on the type and number of ECS publications ordered. More sophisticated analyses of such forms could provide more precise information about how questions and needs vary by state, role position, or issue. Several associations do not use service tracking forms at all, and no organization uses them to the extent it might. For example, a cross-tabular analysis of service tracking forms by state, issue, and type of requestor would provide a lot of systematic information about the most pressing issue concerns of state policymakers and how they vary by role position and state.

Despite the lack of formal, systematic needs assessment, association staff have a good sense of what many members need and want. NCSL staff knew, for example, that members' educational concerns were broadening beyond traditional interests in finance and programs for special populations into issues such as testing, certification, and curriculum--even before the start of the 1983 reform movement. The scant survey information that is available confirms staff perceptions of important issues.

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However, association staff do not have an accurate picture of information needs for the full range of their members; they have the best fix on the needs of those constituents who contact the organizations regularly. As a result, those most in need of assistance (those who do not even know the questions to ask or lack the time and staff to do the asking) may be underserved. In addition, in their needs identification, data collection, and in turn, dissemination, most of the associations emphasize activist states--the states that are doing something. In other words, an informal needs assessment process has the effect of emphasizing the activities, initiatives, and approaches of the most active states. Not only is this bias reflected in the information disseminated, but also in the tailoring of dissemination strategies to this particular subset of members. Such an approach may lead to the neglect of states that leave the bulk of policy initiation to localities, ones that do not capture much press attention, or states that do not require much assistance because they are fairly satisfied with their education system and wish to make only incremental changes in policy.

Another drawback of a relatively informal approach to needs assessment is that it is reactive. It defines and basically limits informational needs to what is requested. This contrasts with a strategy that is also supply-focused--asking what is available from research and practice that may be useful to members, and thus creating demand for appropriate, available research.

With a few notable exceptions, such as the associations' promotion of effective schools research, the national organizations have responded to perceived demand rather than actively creating it. A consequence is that information services tend to be limited to what members request rather than what they may need--or what staff knows from research about their needs--but have not asked for. For example, past research indicates that state education agencies (SEAs) need much better comparative cost data on various technical assistance strategies and other administrative operations; assistance in applying trend data as part of long-range planning exercises; and increased policy analysis capability (McDonnell and McLaughlin 1982). However, the requests of SEA staff rarely reflect such organizational capacity issues.

Needs assessment approaches, while very good for many members, are too informal to assure that the needs of all members are identified. The limits on current needs-sensing practices clearly have implications for the associations' dissemination activities.

DISSEMINATION STRATEGIES

The associations' dissemination strategies are generally effective and consistent with how policymakers use information. However, there has been only limited assessment of the actual usage of association materials, and in some specific areas, dissemination activities could be improved.

All the organizations use a variety of dissemination formats: written publications, both periodic and occasional in nature; electronic communications; meetings; telephone assistance; and a limited amount of on-site technical assistance. The general approach taken is an educational one in which the associations supply research-based information that informs the context in which policymakers make decisions. This approach is consistent with findings about the utilization of social science research. Although the direct effects of research in influencing specific policy decisions are negligible (for example, Lynn 1977; Weiss 1978; and Lindblom and Cohen 1979), research can form the backdrop for policy deliberations, help shape debate, and spur public discussion. The associations' dissemination strategies conform to Weiss' (1979) "enlightenment model" where concepts and theoretical perspectives derived from research come to permeate the policymaking process and shape the way policymakers think about social issues. Furthermore, association materials are consistent with findings about products that most effectively capture practitioner attention: they tend to be short and free of jargon (Bellavita 1981).

However, association staff identify several factors that hinder the effectiveness of their dissemination.

- The extent to which members actually use the information provided them has only been assessed in limited informal ways. In addition, no systematic information has been collected about

the comparative effectiveness of different formats, or how they vary across issue or audience. Despite this lack of knowledge, the associations have embarked on some new approaches. For example, CCSSO and NASBE invested in an electronic mail network and ECS has turned to a slicker, more journalistic format for some of its publications. Systematic assessment of the match between format and policy issue and between format and audience could inform future decisions about shifts in approach.

- On-site technical assistance is considered a very effective approach, but funding and staff limitations restrict the level of this activity. Recent foundation grants have enabled NCSL, NASBE, and ECS to expand their work in individual states, but in general, technical assistance is supported by specific, externally-funded projects and constrained by their substantive focus.
- Data bases from which to provide information are inadequate. Although the most common question asked of association staff is "What are other states doing?," knowledge of state policies and programs is limited. Fifty-state information on specific policies is sometimes collected, but often not updated or sufficiently verified. Information may be collected about policy initiation but rarely are there follow-ups to determine what happens once legislation is enacted and regulations written, or to identify which state initiatives are actually operational and working. Multi-state data that is collected is frequently not readily accessible. Existing information stored in file boxes could be made accessible by placing it on-line. Finally, in the absence of regular attempts to collect comprehensive state data, staff knowledge of state-by-state developments depends heavily on informal contacts and press reports, increasing the likelihood of an activist-state bias in information dissemination. Without systematic data collection, staff tend to disseminate information about states that capture headlines or those whose policymakers frequently interact with national staff. (The Consortium's recent effort to think systematically about the types of data that should be included

in a 50-state data base reflect a recognition of and determination to overcome these problems.)

- The associations have engaged in duplicative dissemination efforts at times. For example, two organizations produced short guides on teacher policy at approximately the same time. The Consortium experience and participation in other recent joint activities should promote greater coordination among the associations and make such duplication increasingly rare.

Even with these limitations, association dissemination activities seem generally appropriate. Their effectiveness is laudatory, given a set of severe constraints that affect the associations' abilities to meet member information needs.

CONSTRAINTS ON EFFECTIVE NEEDS IDENTIFICATION AND DISSEMINATION

Several factors significantly constrain association needs assessment and dissemination activities. Some derive from the very nature of the associations and are fixed. Little can be done to change them; the organizations can simply learn to understand them and adjust their activities to live within them. Others are more easily altered and consist of areas the associations can address.

A significant fixed constraint is the nature of the membership. Because members are busy people, with many pressing demands on their time, they often cannot be more active in expressing their needs or more demanding consumers of information. They have no time for surveys, not much time for reading, and they cannot spare time for meetings. In NASBE's case, these problems are compounded; state board members are lay volunteers who live throughout their states. Most devote only a limited portion of their lives to education matters, and they are hard to reach through any centralized communication strategy such as electronic mail to SEA terminals. Board members, and legislators as well, often have difficulty obtaining travel money to attend meetings. ECS has the added challenge of addressing a diverse constituency with varying needs and usage patterns. ECS is the secondary organization for governors, legislators, board members, and chiefs, and must therefore, carve out a unique position for itself.

Since the constituent leadership of all the organizations changes frequently, staff have to respond to shifting goals and agendas. Organizations seek visible, active officers to promote their national leadership role. However such efficacious principals usually have their own priorities, and staff often have to make rapid adjustments in work plan. Frequent shifts are particularly problematic when on-going policy analysis, which takes time to accomplish, is affected. (ECS and NGA are particularly vulnerable to these rapid shifts in priorities because their governor-leaders often have well-defined issue agendas they wish the associations to pursue.)

An organization's physical location may also present a constraint. The clearest impact of this limitation occurs in the case of NCSL where the education program's separation from the analytic and support operations in Denver has restricted its access to data bases and to publication space. Communication between the offices has improved in the last year, however, indicating that physical location is a constraint that can be ameliorated if faced and addressed.

The availability of funding is a major limitation for all the associations. Essentially, they all ultimately derive their core funding--state dues--from the same source, the state legislature. Supply is thus restricted while organizational demand for resources continues to grow. With the exception of ECS, the associations must devote significant expenditures to their historic primary purpose, lobbying and federal activities. The services addressed in this report--needs identification, the generation of data to distribute, dissemination, and technical assistance--are very staff-intensive, costly activities.

Problems with providing services exclusively from dues and fees has led the organizations to seek outside funding for projects. Although these funds have enabled the organizations to expand beyond their initial lobbying and networking functions into policy analytic activities, dependence on outside funding poses serious dangers:

- The organizations are forced to compete with one another because the same governmental, foundation, and corporate sources are actual or potential funders for each organization.
- The priorities of outside funders can drive the associations' agendas, leading staff to pursue projects that are relatively peripheral to core member needs.
- Associations may conduct a series of projects that bear little relation to one another and are difficult to integrate.
- Projects are undertaken because funds are available even if there is no match between the project's requirements and staff availability or expertise. Projects are accepted that stretch organizational capacity in terms of time and skill.
- As external money ebbs and flows, staff may need to expand and contract. The "accordion syndrome" creates considerable instability and consequent morale problems.

In part, because of their dependence on outside funding, the organizations are constrained in their ability to attract and retain high quality staff to perform analytical and information-generating activities. The unstable funding base, insecurity about continued employment, and the need to devote large segments of time to proposal writing and fund-raising are serious disincentives. Furthermore, high-quality analysts may resent the time constituent service and other organizational duties, such as meeting planning, take from their research. Their willingness to work at the associations expresses a preference for applied research, but they would probably enjoy time to explore more scholarly aspects of their work and to write occasionally for an academic audience. The demands of association employment rarely permit such activities.

An important constraint on dissemination activities is the lack of good state-by-state data in education. As indicated, in the absence of systematic multi-state data, dissemination tends to focus only on the activities of the most active states. In addition, much of the information disseminated through some formats--newsletters, in particular--may derive from specific projects that, because they reflect

the priorities of outside funders, focus on issues that are not central to member needs. The Consortium 50-state data-base project addresses this constraint, and the Consortium itself speaks to a final limitation on needs assessment and dissemination: a lack of communication among the associations. In the past, staff knew little about the research in progress and publication plans of the other associations. They conducted duplicative activities and undertook only a few joint endeavors.

The associations have made an impressive effort to address the limitations that are most amenable to change, in particular, by enhancing their data capacity and communicating more with each other. Perhaps little can be done about the activity level of members or physical location, other than recognizing their potential implications and adjusting to them. The issues of funding, external support, and staffing pose the deepest dilemmas, as all association staff interviewed in this project acknowledge. The final section of this paper focuses on improving needs assessment and dissemination activities within the context imposed by such limitations.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE ACTIVITIES

This brief review of association needs identification and dissemination suggests four major implications.

First, the associations should make a greater effort to define the priorities and core needs of membership. Since surveys have clear limitations, a multi-dimensional approach to needs assessment is required. Focus groups, or structured small-group discussions, are a promising tactic. The development of service-tracking forms in some cases, or the better use of them in others, will provide more precise, useful information. Forms should record accurate and complete information about the nature of the request and its substance. If properly analyzed, they could yield answers to such questions as: Do requests concern new enactments or on-going programs? Do requests focus on implementation issues or Which programs seem to be working well and why? How do requests vary across policy issue, position of the person making the request, and state?

Second, building on an improved assessment process, the organizations should identify the service needs most central to their members. Given funding shortages and the hazards inherent to an over-dependence on outside funding, the identification of core services may very well lead to a streamlining of the organization. In these cases, peripheral services that depend on marginal resources should be eliminated. For example, if policy analysis is not high on a list of membership priorities--or if it becomes clear that members value the results of policy analysis but do not care which organization produces it--it would be wise to cut back on this function. Original policy analyses might be restricted to issues that are not being analyzed by others, and where there are clear gaps to fill. Staff skills then might be applied to translating the work of other researchers or joining in dissemination activities of other organizations, universities, and research institutes. Streamlined associations might be smaller, but they would certainly be more stable.

Third, the organizations should consider opportunities for a greater division-of-labor among them. The data-base project is a good model of an activity in which individual associations are taking primary responsibility for specific aspects of a joint endeavor. Assignments reflect organizational interests and capacity. For example, CCSSO will work with the task force on State Education Governance Structures to update its existing governance data base. Cooperation has also extended to joint fund-raising. For example, the Danforth Foundation now funds joint ECS-NCSL and NCSL-NASBE projects. Other funding sources could be approached in concert, perhaps with one of the organizations taking the lead in performing, synthesizing, or translating research and the others joining in the dissemination of research products.

Finally, the associations should make a greater effort to match staff expertise to organizational objectives. Improved needs identification will clarify those objectives, and it should then be easier to attract and retain appropriate staff. Matching tasks to capacity means more specialization, rather than asking everyone to do a little bit of everything. For example, if policy analysis is a major organizational goal, analysts should be freed from constituent-service

activities that pull them away from their research and given time to pursue that research in a manner rewarding to them. If policy analysis is less important, staff should be skilled in constituent service and trained to broker to those in universities or other organizations when members request research-based information. Streamlining around core objectives will greatly enhance stability, and that in itself will help in staff attraction, retention, and satisfaction.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The needs identification and dissemination activities of the five national associations serving state education policymakers are generaly effective. Needs identification is informal, but gives staff a good sense of the information needs of a large proportion of members. Dissemination activities are varied, creative, and consistent with research findings about effective communication to policymakers. Underlying dilemmas about the role of outside funding, the organizations' commitment to original policy analysis, and their national leadership function are reflected in decisions about information services and in constraints on the effectiveness of these services. Four implications emerge from findings about needs assessment and dissemination activities within the constraints the organizations face. The associations should consider: more systematic and varied approaches to needs-assessment, matching activities more directly to members' core needs, opportunities for a greater division-of-labor among the five organizations, and strengthened efforts to match staff expertise with organizational objectives.

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APPENDIX 1

COUNCIL OF CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS

Description:

A membership organization of the chief state school officers of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and 6 territories, established in 1927.

Stated Purpose:

- To provide service and means of cooperative action among members
- To seek members' consensus on major education issues and express their views
- To conduct special projects which address problems of concern at the state level
- To coordinate seminars, educational travel, and special study programs which provide opportunitites for professional growth

Recent Special Projects and Sources of Support:

Center on Educational Equity - U.S. Department of Education, Carnegie, the Ford Foundation
Community Education Project - C.S. Mott Foundation
Teacher of the Year Award - *The Encyclopedia Britannica* and *Good Housekeeping*
International Education Project - Exxon Foundation, Longview Foundation and U.S.-Japan Friendship Commission
K/12-Postsecondary Collaborative Education Project - Mellon Foundation
State Technology Leadership Project -NIE
Liaison between SEA's and NCES - NCES
Center on Evaluation and Assessment - NCES and foundations
Math and Science Goals Project - NSF
Teacher in Space Project - NASA
Humanities and the Schools Project - NEH and Rockefeller Foundation
Arts and the Schools - National Endowment for the Arts and Rockefeller Foundation

Publications:

Electronic Mail: Newletters - "Chiefline," "Hill Notes," "SEA Executive Fellows." Data bases - Excellence Clearinghouse, Collaborative Ed, Tech file

Stateline - quarterly newsletter
Board Briefs - twice-a-year newsletter summarizing CCSSO board actions
Concerns - quarterly newsletter from the Resource Center on Sex Equity
Monographs published by special projects
Reports written by ad hoc committees

Meetings:

Annual meeting
Summer Institutes which focus on single topics

Technical Assistance:

Provided through Center on Educational Equity

EDUCATION COMMISSION OF THE STATES

Description:

An interstate compact of 48 states, the District of Columbia, and 3 territories, established in 1966. Primary constituents are governors, legislative leaders and their senior policy aides, chief state school officers, state higher education executive officers and their senior policy associates, state education boards, state leadership of local schools and campuses, and others not in these categories, but who are appointed by governors as ECS Commissioners.

Stated Purpose:

- To undertake policy research, surveys, and special studies in response to the needs of state policymakers.
- To serve as a clearinghouse of information about state policies and proposals, statistical information, research findings, and other sources of data.
- To organize forums at the state, regional, and national levels for ECS primary constituencies to exchange views, explore new ideas, and build relationships.
- To facilitate nationwide cooperation in education by providing information to the federal government and to national organizations, representing state interests in national forums, stimulating intergovernmental coordination, and helping state officials exercise leadership beyond their state roles.

Recent Special Projects and Sources of Support:

Advanced Legislative Program Services (ALPS) - State fees, Ford Foundation jointly with NCSL
At-Risk Youth - Business Advisory Commission
Education/Business Initiatives - Carnegie
Governance Study - Spencer
Information Clearinghouse - State fees
Interstate Migrant Education Council - U.S. Department of Education and member states
New Jersey State Project - The Commission on Business Efficiency of the Public Schools
Quality Undergraduate Education - State fees
School Finance and Improvement in Michigan - Michigan State Senate
State Administration of Chapter I - subcontract from Abt Associates, U.S. Department of Education

State Alternative Roles for Improving Instructional Materials - U.S. Department of Education
State Education Policy Consortium - NIE
State Education Policy Seminars (SEPS) - State fees, Ford Foundation, Sears Roebuck
State Efforts to Improve Educational Quality - NIE
State-Local Policy Networks - Danforth
State and Local-Carnegie Involvement Study
Teacher Renaissance Effort - State fees
Technical Assistance to State Legislatures - Danforth

Publications:

State Education Leader - quarterly newspaper
Issuegrams - brief analyses of major educational issues, approximately 5 per year
Footnotes - quarterly newsletter of the ECS Law and Education Center
Working Papers - monographs reporting on specific projects or surveys
Annual reports on school finance
School Finance at a Glance wall chart
Handbooks - guides to policymakers
Task Force reports

Meetings:

Annual meeting
Advanced Leadership Program Services (ALPS) for legislators, co-sponsored by NCSL
State Education Policy Seminars (SEPS) - a program of seminars on educational issues in 38 states, co-sponsored by the Institute for Educational Leadership
Special workshops and conferences

Technical Assistance:

Under contract to states or supported by foundation grants

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE BOARDS OF EDUCATION

Description:

A membership organization of state board members in 45 states, the District of Columbia, and 4 territories, established in 1959.

Stated Purpose:

- To strengthen state leadership in educational policymaking
- To promote excellence in education for all students
- To advocate equality of access to educational opportunity
- To assure responsible lay governance of public education

Recent Special Projects and Sources of Support:

Alcohol Education Guidelines Project - Distilled Spirits Council of the United States
The Family Life Education Project - Ford, Dodge, and Huber Foundations
Textbooks and Instructional Materials Project - U.S. Department of Education, jointly with CCSSO
The Parent Education Project - Tobacco Institute
Education Partnership for Excellence - C.S. Mott Foundation
Coordinating State Legislative and State Board Policies for Education Reform - Danforth, jointly with NCSL
Adolescent Pregnancy and Parenting - Womens Education Equity Act, jointly with CCSSO
State Educational Policy Consortium - NIE

Publications:

Electronic Mail: "Weekly Update" newsletter
State Board Connection - monthly newsletter
Boardsmanship Briefs - newsletter on published aspects of board service published 10 times a year
Issue briefs
Research Abstracts — Published by specific projects
Policymaker guides

Meetings:

Annual meeting
Regional meetings
Annual Board Chairmen's Leadership Conference

Technical Assistance:

Supported by specific projects

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NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES

Description:

A membership organization of legislators and legislative staff from the 50 states and American territories and commonwealths, created in 1975 from the merger of 3 organizations representing state legislatures.

Stated Purpose:

- To improve the quality and effetiveness of state legislatures
- To foster interstate communication and cooperation
- To assure state legislatures a strong, cohesive voice in the federal system

Recent Special Projects and Sources of Support (related to education):

Technical assistance to legislatures on educational issues with fiscal implications - NIE
Job-Training program - U.S. Department of Labor
Technical Assistance to State Legislatures - Danforth Foundation, jointly with ECS
Coordination of Child Care and early Childhood Policies in Legislatures - the Carnegie Corporation
Coordinating State Legislative and State Board Policies for Educational Reform - Danforth Foundation, jointly with NASBE
State Educational Policy Consortium - NIE

Publications:

State Legislatures - monthly magazine
Capitol to Capitol - bi-monthly newsletter on federal issues
State Legislative Report - short monographs and issue briefs
Legislator's Guides to specific policy issues

Meetings:

Annual meeting
Workshops sponsored by projects
Advanced Leadership Program Services (ALPS) for legislators interested in Education, co-sponsored by ECS
Education and Job Training Committee meetings (3 times a year)

Technical Assistance:

Supported by the NIE contract, the Danforth, and Carnegie Grants

NATIONAL GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION

Description:

A membership organization of the governors of the 50 states and 5 territories and commonwealths, founded in 1908.

Stated Purpose:

- To influence national policy
- To apply creative leadership to the solution of state problems

Recent Special Projects and Sources of Support (related to Education):

Job-Training Parnership Act Technical Assistance Project - U.S. Department of Labor
Employment-Training - Commission for Employment Policy
Performance Standards for Refugee Resettlement - U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
International Employment/Training - German Marshall Fund
The Governors' Action Plan for Attaining Educational Excellence - U.S. Department of Education and several foundations
State Educational Policy Consortium - NIE

Publications:

The Governor's Bulletin - weekly newsletter
Capital Ideas - report on research in progress and abstracts of related studies
Task force reports
Policy papers published by projects

Meetings:

Annual meeting
Winter meeting
Educational subcommittee meetings, 3-4 times a year

Technical Assistance:

Supported by specific projects